

Dear Connecticut Legislators,

My name is Erin Merryn. I am a 28 year old from Chicago who is on a personal crusade to get Erin's Law passed in all fifty states. As a child I was taught yearly in school on tornado drills, bus drills, fire drills, stranger danger, DARE, Bully intervention, internet safety....I could go on and on. I knew not to go look for the lost puppy, I knew how to run out of the burning building, and I graduated from DARE knowing the 8 ways of how to say NO to drugs. But where were the 8 ways on how to get away and tell today? They never came in my childhood so when I woke up as a 6 year old at an overnight at my best friend's house to her uncle molesting me I didn't know how to tell. When he continued to molest me and eventually rape me at 7 years old I kept it a secret. This man threatened me that he would come get me if I told anyone. From ages 6 to 8 ½ I continued to be molested and raped by him.

My saving grace came at 8 ½ when I learned we were moving only to find out I was getting that much closer to my next perpetrator this time a family member. From 11-13 years old my older teenaged cousin molested me. He threatened me every time that this was our secret, no one would believe me, and I would destroy our family if I told. The only message I was getting as a child was from the men hurting me and that came from threats to silence me. Had I been taught to speak up and not keep this a secret, on what a safe touch and unsafe touch is, a safe secret and an unsafe secret I feel I would have spoken up from the start instead of being abused for years as a child. It is the lesson we fail to teach our children across this world and I have made it my mission for every child to be empowered with the voice I never had as a kid.

I went after Erin's Law in my home state of Illinois that requires children in Pre-K through 12th grade to be taught age appropriate sexual abuse prevention every year. The first portion of the law created a task force that studied what needed to be done. I was on that task force for 10 months with 19 other experts in the prevention of child abuse. We submitted our recommendations for the state that came with requiring all school personal to be trained in sexual abuse prevention and all children to be taught every year on it. There are already plenty of researched based curriculums across America teaching this through role plays, discussions, activity books, and children's books. We encourage the parents to continue the conversation at home. Erin's Law doesn't take away parental rights. Every parent is informed in a letter the program is going to be taught and if they do not want their child to participate to sign the sheet and send it back with your child. The child will be pulled out of the class when it is taught.

We put so much emphasis on stranger danger with kids when 93% of the time children are abused by someone they know and trust. Only 7% of the time it is that stranger we worry so much about. There are 42 million survivors of sexual abuse are living in America right now. 3 million of those are children. That could fill 46 national football stadiums. Get that image in your head for a moment. These children are sitting in our classrooms everyday living in silence and their school work is suffering as well as their innocence being killed.

It is time we start fighting the war going on in our own backyards by empowering children with their voice and putting sex offenders out of business. I am on a mission to get this passed in all 50 states. So far I have testified in 6 states. 5 states have passed it and 10 more are introducing it. Next week I head to the National Governor's Association with my state Governor Quinn to speak to all Governors on the importance of passing Erin's Law in every state. I hope we can make Connecticut the next state to pass this. After the tragedy in December to the children in Newtown it is time we do something for the safety of children in Connecticut by keeping sex offenders from silencing them.

Connecticut legislators do right by the children. Give that 7 year old that is being sexually abused tonight the voice to tell someone tomorrow instead of continuing to be sexually abused and raped for years and waiting until she is in drug rehab at 30 years old and disclosing to her mother what her step-father repeatedly did for years to her at night. Give children the voice I never had as a child. Thank You!

Erin Merryn